Key Issues

High intensity conflict remains the key trigger for food insecurity in Syria, causing displacements, inflation and high cost of living, eroded purchasing power of population, fragmented markets, disrupted production and collapsed safety nets, among others. Based on the Needs and Population Monitoring (NPM) data implemented through the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), over 340,000 persons have been displaced across the country in the last quarter of 2016 due to deteriorated security conditions. Most displacements (52% of cases) occurred in December 2016 with the majority of newly displaced people originating from three governorates, including Aleppo (58%), Deir-ez-Zor (13%) and Ar-Raqqa (9%). The newly displaced people are most vulnerable as they often lack access to shelter, food and other basic services such as health, water, sanitation, hygiene and education.

Market prices of core food items (wheat flour, bread, sugar, lentils) and diesel continued to rise in the last quarter of 2016 undermining households’ purchasing power and diminishing their ability to purchase food. In December 2016, national average prices of all the above-mentioned items were considerably higher than a year ago. Particularly significant quarterly increases were recorded in Deir-ez-Zor governorate where prices of most food items have more than doubled, while the price of diesel has soared by over 600 percent. Reportedly, food prices have gone down following the air drops of aid that were carried out by the United Nations (UN) in Deir-ez-Zor city last month. Over the past year, relative to the United States Dollar (USD), the Syrian Pound (SYP) has depreciated by 23 percent.

Winter wheat and barley crops, to be harvested May 2017, were planted between October and December 2016. The Agricultural Stress Index (ASI) shows signs of healthy crop growth in northwest Syria, southern governorates as well as the coastal areas. Nevertheless, prospects for 2017 cereal production in Syria are bleak due to ongoing conflict and damaged agricultural infrastructure and value-chains (machinery, inputs, water, storage). Currently, agriculture represents a major sector of the country’s economy, contributing about 60 percent of the gross-domestic products (GDP) as different economic sectors have drastically contracted since the start of the crisis.

Based on information from the WoS Nutrition Cluster (NC), out of 493,345 children aged five and under screened in the health facilities across Syria in October-December 2016, 14,106 were found to suffer from acute malnutrition, of which 3,203 were in the severe form. Severely malnourished children are at nine times more risk of death compared to well-nourished children.

Hot spot areas: Areas in Aleppo, Deir-ez-Zor and Ar-Raqqa governorates with high severity of food insecurity and a total estimated population in need of 962,000 (Humanitarian Needs Overview, 2017) can be considered hot spot areas for this reporting period in terms of deteriorating food security conditions. These people could not be reached by humanitarian actors throughout the year due to inaccessibility and insecurity within the areas. Deir-ez-Zor has been affected with the steep increase in food and fuel prices due to escalation of the conflict and restricted access to markets. Most attacks and displacement occurred in the Aleppo governorate. A higher proportion of children affected by acute malnutrition were found among internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Eastern Aleppo compared with the national prevalence (3%). Eighty percent of the newly displaced people originated from these three governorates during this quarter.
Security Situation

The intensity of conflict remained high during the last quarter of 2016. Over 1,400 air strikes were reported across all governorates except for Quneitra, Sweida and Tartous, i.e. four airstrikes per day on average (Figure 1). There were several reports of farms/farmland targeted by airstrikes or shelling. Most air strikes occurred in the Aleppo Governorate in October, while additional air strikes were observed in Hama and Ar-Raqqah in November and in Idlib Governorate in December. Overall, Aleppo was by far the most affected governorate in this period with over 1,000 recorded incidents. The largest concentration of security incidents could also be observed in the urban centres that are contested between the armed groups, such as Idlib, Hama and Deir-ez-Zor (Figure 1).

The Aleppo offensive by the armed forces of the Government of Syria and allied groups was seen as a turning point in the conflict. By December, only five percent of the urban area remained under opposition control. The high intensity of conflict in October was followed by a relatively calmer November, while the conflict intensified again in December (Figure 2).

Figure 1: Security Incidents in Syria and Concentration of security incidents by governorates (October-December 2016), Source: iMMAP, Iraq Country Office

Figure 2: Trend in Security Incidents in Syria (October-December 2016), Source: iMMAP Iraq Country Office

2 UN News Center. 2016. ‘It is past time for you to act’ to end carnage in Aleppo, UN chief tells emergency Security Council session, 16 December 2016 (available at UN News Center).
Population Movement

Since the start of the crisis, over six million people have been displaced internally in Syria. According to the OCHA NPM data more than 340,000 persons were forced to leave their homes during the last quarter of 2016 in all governorates (Figure 3). At times thousands of individuals per day were registered as IDPs. The siege of Aleppo was especially devastating, forcing many people to leave their city. About a quarter (23%) of these IDPs arrived to formal or informal collective shelters and camps, while others settled with host households, abandoned buildings, rented place, and in rare cases, own houses. Some of the IDPs were even displaced several times.

The map below shows the districts where most of the IDPs arrived in the last quarter of 2016. Urban centres, especially Aleppo, as well as areas close to the border with Turkey have received large numbers of displaced people (Map 2).

Agriculture

Prior to conflict, the agriculture sector contributed 18 percent to the country’s gross domestic product (GDP) and employed 17 percent of its labour force in production. Since the start of the crisis, as different economic sectors drastically contracted the share of agriculture in the country, the GDP reached 60 percent (CFSAM, 2016). The primary agricultural products are wheat, barley, cotton, olives, lentils, chickpeas, sugar beets, beef, mutton, eggs, poultry, and milk.

Crops

According to the latest Crop and Food Security Assessment Mission (CFSAM) report, both planting (2015/16 cropping season) and harvesting of wheat and barley in 2016 were significantly lower compared to a pre-crisis level as well as the previous year. The reduction in yields resulted in an estimated shortfall of about 838,000 tonnes in the country’s national wheat requirement of 3,854 million tonnes, taking into account commercial imports.

Between October and December 2016, farmers were involved in land preparation and sowing of wheat, barley and winter vegetables. Moderate but timely precipitation was received across the country during this period. The agricultural stress index (ASI) that combines vegetation condition and temperature variables indicates signs of healthy crop growth in northwest Syria, southern governorates as well as the coastal areas (Map 3).


5 FAO. 2016. GIEWS - Global Information and Early Warning System. Country Analysis (available at FAO-GIEWS)
In the reporting period, humanitarian agencies supported vulnerable households with emergency food aid to meet the immediate food needs and provided agricultural support to ensure the households produce their own food. A total of 87,452 households were supported with agricultural inputs, including seeds, pesticides and equipment. Out of this, wheat seeds were distributed to approximately 40,000 households (200-250kg per household) in Aleppo, Idleb, Hama, Homs, Dar’a, Rural Damascus, Al-Hasakeh and Quneitra governorates (Figure 4). The majority of wheat seed recipients were in Rainfall Zones 1, 2 and 3, which are areas suitable for wheat production (Map 4). From about 9,000 tons of wheat seeds distributed, 80,000-100,000 tons of wheat grain harvest is expected to be collected under rainfed production.

**Livestock**

The livestock sector has been seriously affected by the conflict with significant reductions in herd and flock numbers. Poultry production, the main and most affordable source of protein of animal origin, has declined from the pre-conflict levels by 60 percent due to unavailability of poultry feed at affordable costs. Livestock herds have decreased by over 30 percent for cattle and over 40 percent for sheep and goats. Damage to infrastructure of the agro-processing industry, destruction of natural pastures and high levels of insecurity has also affected availability and accessibility of livestock feed. The precarious situation in the livestock sector has been further compounded by dry spells experienced in 2016, which affected pasture availability and resulted in the increase of feed prices. The impact was especially felt in locations with high concentration of IDPs who had fled with their herds. During the last quarter of 2016, there were few reported disease incidences affecting livestock. In Idleb confirmed cases of Peste des Petits Ruminants (PPR) virus were reported, which was an indication of the presence of the virus in some of the goat and sheep flocks in the governorate (FSS, Livestock Technical Working Group, South Turkey). WoS FSS partners supported only 1,500 households through animal vaccination programs and about 3,700 households with livestock asset restoration activities, such as animal feed and live animal distribution.

6 FAO/WFP Syria Food Security Sector Monthly Reporting (Unpublished Internal Document)

Market Prices

The conflict has affected market dynamics and infrastructures in many ways. Supply lines were disrupted and trade routes have either been cut off or altered; previous GoS support on strategic market chains were disrupted; market infrastructures were damaged or destroyed; transportation services were affected by increasing diesel prices and altered supply routes (checkpoint taxes); devaluation of the Syrian pound against the US dollar and inflation impacted prices and trading patterns between traders and suppliers.

The market prices for diesel as well as core food items such as wheat flour, bread, sugar, rice and lentils were collected from various market monitoring systems throughout Syria. National average prices of the above-mentioned items mostly show increases in the last quarter of 2016 as well as over the past year both in SYP and USD terms (Figure 5). Between October and December 2016, diesel prices in SYP rose more significantly (31%) compared to the prices of most food items (10-19% increase). In contrast, bread prices fell sharply in the same period (34%); similar trends were observed in most parts of the country. The greatest price gains were recorded in Deir-ez-Zor (besieged area), especially for diesel, which surged over 600 percent in the reference period. In December 2016, the highest prices (2-3 times above the national average) for the above-mentioned items were also found in Deir-ez-Zor.

Price dynamics inside Syria do not reflect price trends on international markets that show an overall downward trend. For example, the FAO Sugar Price Index declined by 16.7 percent from October to December 2016. The index is 26 percent higher than the same month last year. The sharp fall in international sugar prices in the last quarter of 2016 was mainly driven by rising exports from Brazil, the largest sugar producer/exporter.

In December 2016, the International Grain Council (IGC) wheat sub-Index was down by two and seven percent since October 2016 and December 2015 respectively. Similarly, rice sub-index reduced in the same periods of comparison by one and four percent respectively.

Price dynamics also increased year by year both in SYP although marginally in USD terms (33% and 3% respectively). The higher rates of price increase in SYP versus USD could partly be attributed to a significant (23%) depreciation in the value of SYP against the USD over the past year and increased dependence on imports.

The trend analysis also covered prices in the governorate centres of Ar-Raqqa, Idleb, Hama and Al-Hasakeh governorates where market data was consistently available during the reporting period. These towns have mostly seen increases in food and diesel prices both quarterly and annually. In December 2016, the highest prices for all items were observed in Ar-Raqqa (Figure 6).

In general, market prices showed greater volatility in Rural Damascus, Damascus, Deir-ez-Zor, Ar-Raqqa and Homs compared to other areas within Syria, particularly for diesel and bread.

December 2016 Prices (SYP)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Raqqa</th>
<th>Al-Hasakeh</th>
<th>Idleb</th>
<th>Hama</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lentils</td>
<td>644</td>
<td>485</td>
<td>527</td>
<td>432</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rice</td>
<td>630</td>
<td>547</td>
<td>439</td>
<td>376</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sugar</td>
<td>589</td>
<td>509</td>
<td>445</td>
<td>426</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diesel</td>
<td>521</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>358</td>
<td>319</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wheat</td>
<td>429</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>217</td>
<td>164</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bread</td>
<td>349</td>
<td>153</td>
<td>192</td>
<td>204</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 6: December 2016 Prices in Ar-Raqqa, Al-Hasakeh, Idleb and Hama for food basket items and fuel
**Nutrition and Health**

The most recent SMART write out nutrition surveys conducted in Syria (11 out of 14 governorates) in 2015/16, indicated acceptable levels of acute malnutrition (GAM of 3%) and chronic malnutrition (12.7%) among children under-five based on the World Health Organization (WHO) classification (<5% and <20% respectively). However, the surveys revealed poor levels of Global Acute Malnutrition (GAM) of 7.8% among women in child-bearing age (CBA), which potentially can trigger a vicious cycle of intergeneration transmission of undernutrition in the context of dominant aggravating factors, such as sub-optimum infant and young child feeding (IYCF) practices, food insecurity, population displacement, limited access to quality water and poor hygiene practices and the high prevalence of diarrhoea and other childhood diseases.

In October-December 2016, 493 345 children under five years of age were screened in health facilities across Syria, out of which 14 106 (3%) were found to suffer from acute malnutrition. Of the 14 106, three thousand two hundred three (3 203) children were in the severe form and at nine times more risk of death compared to well-nourished children. Screening data (November 2016-January 2017) among IDPs in Eastern Aleppo, on the other hand, indicated higher proportion of children affected by the global acute malnutrition compared with the national prevalence of three percent. Among the 16 929 children under age five screened by mid-upper arm circumference (MUAC), 886 were detected with acute malnutrition (5.2%), the majority of whom were moderate acute malnutrition (MAM) cases.

According to Early Warning Alert and Response Network (EWARN) monitoring information that covers 11 governorates inside Syria, about one third (32-37%) of the monitored drinking water sources (1 087 sources in the first two weeks of January) have not been functional in 10 governorates of Syria in the past quarter of 2016. Epidemiological monitoring data indicates acute diarrhoea (AD) to be the second highest reported illness (next to influenza like illnesses) among children under age five over the past quarter (22-35% out of the total reported diseases). The highest numbers of AD cases have been registered in Aleppo, Al-Hasakeh, Dar’a, Deir-ez-Zor and Idleb governorates (Figure 7).

Multi antigen vaccination campaign (AIRI3) was implemented among children under age five with support from WHO and UNICEF in three rounds in WoS in 2016, targeting hard-to-reach areas. The third round of the campaign was carried out in Idleb, north of Hama, north of Homs and Afrin in Aleppo in November-December 2016.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Governorate</th>
<th>October</th>
<th>November</th>
<th>December</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Idleb</td>
<td>1,967</td>
<td>1,873</td>
<td>2,076</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deir-ez-Zor</td>
<td>1,875</td>
<td>1,570</td>
<td>1,527</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Al-Hasakeh</td>
<td>1,419</td>
<td>1,462</td>
<td>1,509</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aleppo</td>
<td>1,137</td>
<td>1,017</td>
<td>1,345</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dar’a</td>
<td>508</td>
<td>539</td>
<td>602</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homs</td>
<td>227</td>
<td>236</td>
<td>261</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ar-Raqa</td>
<td>182</td>
<td>177</td>
<td>312</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hama</td>
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<td>196</td>
<td>201</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural Damascus</td>
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<td>132</td>
<td>137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quneitra</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>137</td>
<td>122</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 7: Trends in acute diarrhoea cases among children under-five by Governorates (October-December 2016)**

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